

Key Points Around Teacher Workload and Other Educational Priorities

Dear Senate Committee on Education: Chair Senator Michael Dembrow, Vice-Chair Senator Suzanne Weber, Senator Dick Anderson, Senator Lew Frederick, Senator Sarah Gelser Blouin, Senator Art Robinson and Senator Rob Wagner. Thank you for welcoming us to speak with you today.

My name is Sarah Ruggiero Kirby. I have been a 6-12 grade math, science and CTE teacher in Oregon for more than 25 years. I am a founding member of Oregon Educators for Climate Education (OECE), and helped to create Senate Bill 854. As teachers on this committee, we have heard *much* about the concern of *teacher workload*. And in truth, this is a vital question. We certainly get it. We also understand the urgency of other educational priorities, particularly around the significant impacts of COVID on student skills, understanding and behavior.

These are not problems existing in silos. We need to step away from the scarcity mentality, where one educational priority takes precedence over another, but rather move toward an integrated, whole child/whole teacher approach. The overwhelming workload that teachers are experiencing is a direct result of asking teachers to do more with less, for far too long. We can not expect any real change in teacher burnout, mass exodus from the profession or low student performance unless we wholeheartedly start financially supporting public education, especially because we are educating Oregon's future engineers, doctors, business owners, legislators and more. Intensified reading and math programs can help students with basic skills, but often lack the student inspiration and connection required to create life-long learners. We, as an educational system, need to shift our focus toward integrated instructional strategies, material and content that inspire students and teachers alike, promoting creative problem solving, prioritizing relevance and relationship in understanding, and helping students to see themselves as part of the local and global community.

Below are some common questions we have heard, and some solution-oriented responses:

Is this going to add more work for teachers? No. The focus of instruction in all subject areas changes on a regular basis as a result of ongoing shifts in standards and legislation. Teachers, with guidance and tools from their school districts, regional education service districts, and the Oregon Department of Education, will

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be equipped to make local connections to climate change topics. Instead of “more work,” it’s more a matter of reframing what already gets taught.

Students need to focus on reading, writing and mathematics. Yes, and... they can do this in the context of a topic that inspires them, feels relevant and puts their learning in context. Math lessons can incorporate measurements and calculations in nature in the younger grades, and data analysis, statistics and mathematical modeling in the upper grades. Reading and writing can incorporate opportunities to journal observations in nature, write poetry, reading about the natural world, writing well researched argumentative essays, depending on the grade level. This is not a trade-off. It’s learning about climate change and the natural world in the context of reading, writing and mathematics. Young students have innate curiosity that is inspiring. Older students are searching for relevance. Climate change can provide relevant, inspiring frameworks for integrated learning.

How is this different from NGSS? The global problem of 51 gigatons of greenhouse gasses entering the earth’s atmosphere yearly calls for a dramatic shift in our economy and the way we are preparing young people for tomorrow’s jobs. Curriculum and schools can and must meet the challenge. In STEM classes SB 854 would bolster and amplify NGSS, teaching students how their regions of Oregon are affected by climate change, exploring adaptations/solutions that preserve the Oregon way of life, building resilient, sustainable, profitable economies.

How might teacher training happen? Professional development is provided annually to teachers already and is within all districts’ budgets. Education Service Districts (ESDs), STEM Hubs, and Regional Education Networks (RENs) routinely provide workshops and webinars to support ongoing Professional Learning Opportunities. This structure offers an opportunity for community partnerships with local, regional and state agencies/organizations to provide the necessary knowledge, with guidance from ODE.

Will this require new K-12 standards? Modifications to current standards or additional standards would be required. In most cases, key concepts like “sustainability” and “climate change” can be integrated into current standards as examples, topics, or themes for classroom teachers to explore.

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How will ODE have the resources to support its role in this legislation if enacted?

Possible, existing sources include the CAT tax, Federal grants (Inflation Reduction Act), CTE funding (career pathway connections), Community Renewable Energy Grant Program, future legislative session, NPO grants, Oregon Lottery or some combination of these.